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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of many issues related to the training and qualifications of early childhood center directors. The overview first covers competencies needed for effective center administration in the areas of: (1) organization and leadership; (2) child development and early childhood programing; (3) fiscal and legal issues; and (4) board, parent, and community relations. Subsequent discussion summarizes state regulations that govern minimum qualifications, and presents a profile of predominant characteristics of early childhood center directors. Also considered are the link between qualifications of directors and indices of program quality, and policy implications of increasing minimum qualifications. In addition, the paper provides a rationale for increasing the requisite skill and knowledge base of center directors, and details the economic and social ramifications of implementing such policies. It is concluded that the manner in which states respond will not only affect the quality of program services provided in the future, but also the ability of the field to attract and retain competent and dedicated professionals. A list of references is included. (RH)

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THE TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS OF CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTORS

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Introduction

The director's role in the early childhood center is both central and complex. In a number of powerful ways the director influences the climate of a center both as a workplace for the teaching staff and as an educational and nurturing environment for children. While there is uniform agreement in the literature about the importance of the director's role and the need for highly trained personnel to serve in this capacity, there is a surprising lack of agreement about what constitutes minimum qualifications and how individuals should be trained. There also appears to be a lack of consensus about the nomenclature used to describe personnel who oversee the administration of center-based programs.

This paper will provide an overview of the many issues related to the training and qualifications of center directors. First, it will look at the competencies needed for effective center administration. It will then summarize state regulations governing minimum qualifications and present a profile of the individuals who currently hold this position. Finally, it will look at the link between qualifications and indices of program quality and discuss the policy implications of increasing minimum qualifications.

The Multifaceted Role of the Early Childhood Center Director

Anyone who has chased the shadow of a center director for even a brief time, knows that being an effective administrator means wearing many hats: budget analyst, building and grounds manager, staff supervisor, record-keeper, receptionist, community liaison, public relations coordinator, curriculum developer, fundraiser, nurse, nutritionist, and child advocate (Axelrod, 1972; Decker & Decker, 1984; Neugebauer, 1984; Sciarra & Dorsey, 1979; Storm, 1985). The list is long and varied.

The repertoire of competencies needed to effectively carry out these roles will vary by the age and background of the children enrolled, the range of services provided, the philosophical orientation of the program, and the legal sponsorship of the center. The size of the program, as well, certainly affects the scope and complexity of the administrative role.

Directors of very small programs may have few administrative tasks and serve as classroom teacher for part of the day whereas directors of large programs may have multiple sites, multiple funding sources, and a large diverse staff to coordinate. Thus, directing different types of programs may require varying levels of administrative sophistication (Spodek & Saracho, 1982).

Defining Competence

Defining competence as it relates to the multiplicity of roles the director assumes each day is the first step in clarifying the issues surrounding training and qualifications. Most conceptualizations of competence include three components: 1) knowledge competency which includes knowledge of psychological theories, teaching strategies, and organizational analysis; 2) skill competency which includes the technical, human, and conceptual skills needed to perform different tasks; and 3) attitude competency which includes the beliefs, values, dispositions, and emotional responses that support optimum performance. Isenberg (1979) cautions that competence must be viewed as as synthesis, rather than a collection of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In other words, it is an "integrative" rather than an "additive" process. Attitude competency, for example, is integral to both knowledge and skill competency.

Task Performance Areas

One way to better understand the range of competencies needed to administrate a program is to look at the task performance areas that encompass the director's role (British Columbia Department of Education, 1979; Busch-Rossnagel & Worman, 1985; Rosenthal, 1978; Texas Department of Human Resources, 1977). These can be grouped into four broad categories.

Organization and Leadership. Directors need a sound understanding of organizational theory in order to assess program needs, articulate a clear vision for the center, implement goals, and evaluate program effectiveness. They also need a good understanding of the dynamics of group behavior and how different leadership styles are appropriate in different situations.

As personnel manager, they must have skill in recruiting, training, and supervising staff in order to maintain a congenial, productive work team. Directors must also manage information and be able to translate program goals into well-written policies and procedures. Additionally, they must be alert to changing demographics, social and economic trends, and new developments in the field. Finally, directors must have knowledge of themselves as a growing professional and how that professional identity translates into a code of ethical behavior and professional responsibility.

Child Development and Early Childhood Programming. In order to guide others in developing and implementing sound programs for young children, directors need a thorough understanding of developmental patterns in early childhood and the implications for individual and group care. They must be keen observers able to assess each child's needs and know how to assist staff in planning developmentally appropriate curricular experiences to meet those needs.

Directors also need a sound understanding of the principles of environmental psychology and how the arrangement of space and materials can support optimal development. They need organizational skills to implement effective systems to maintain enrollment, attendance, and anecdotal data on children. And because they are ultimately accountable for the health and safety of the children in their care, they need a firm grounding in the principles of health, safety, and nutrition as they relate to different aspects of program implementation.

Fiscal and Legal Issues. Because directors must respond to the laws and requirements of different government regulatory agencies and funding sources, they should have a good working knowledge of federal, state, and local regulations governing centers-based programs. As financial manager, they oversee the disbursement of funds and thus should know how to develop a budget, set tuition rates, prepare needed financial reports, and maintain appropriate insurance coverage. In addition, they need a good understanding of the principles of fundraising and grantsmanship in order to secure funding from a variety of private and public sources.

Board, Parent, and Community Relations. Because the director is typically the person that serves as liaison with the center's advisory board, owner, or sponsoring agency, the ability to articulate a rationale for program practices is critical. Directors also serve an important public relations role and thus must also be able to interpret child growth and development to parents and others in the community.

In order to effectively meet the needs of the parents of children enrolled in their program, a knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of family life, particularly families of different social and cultural backgrounds, is also essential.

Finally, in marketing their program and serving as a resource to parents, directors must have a working knowledge of community services that can support their efforts. In this regard, it is important they have regular contacts with professional organizations, state and federal congressional representatives, community service organizations, consultants, public schools, advocacy groups, medical and mental health units, local colleges, and local news media.

State Regulations Governing Minimum Qualification

Currently, there are no federal regulations governing the qualifications of day care directors. Standards for center directors are by and large determined by state regulatory bodies. In most states, the regulation of day care personnel is tied to center licensing and falls under the auspices of the Department of Public Welfare or the state's equivalent Department of Child and Family Social Services. From state to state, however, regulations differ on almost every aspect of what is required. Indeed, as Morgan (1987) points out, the most striking characteristic about the requirements is their diversity. There is neither consistency nor a great deal of specificity in what constitutes minimum qualifications for directors.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that a number of states have promulgated a separate set of standards for early childhood personnel

working in preprimary programs under the auspices of the public schools (Lamme, McMillin, & Clark, 1983; Mitchell, 1988; McCarthy, 1988). The requirements for personnel working with preschool-aged children in these settings is typically tied to the state's teacher certification requirements. Across the board the training and qualifications under these standards are far more stringent than those required for personnel working in programs licensed under the state's department of social services or equivalent regulatory agency.

State requirements for child care personnel are critical because they have an direct impact on the preparation of workers (Spodek & Saracho, 1982). Despite amassing evidence in the research literature about the crucial impact of caregivers on children's development in their early years, personnel requirements for day care personnel are not specifically and uniformly regulated in the same manner as is professional entry into more formal educational settings for children in primary grades (Berk, 1985). This is unfortunate since the one issue on which there is unanimous agreement by researchers is that staff are the single most important determinant of the quality of care provided in early childhood programs (Berk, 1985; Clarke-Stewart & Gruber, 1984; Howes, 1983; Grotberg, Chapman, & Lazar, 1971; Peters & Koestelnik, 1981; Prescott, Jones & Kritchevsky, 1972; Roupp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979).

Nomenclature

The lack of a uniformly-accepted nomenclature do denote personnel who work in early childhood programs has always plagued the field (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986). It is not surprising than that the terms used by states to denote the role of center director also lack consistency.

Some states do not differentiate personnel roles in child care settings and instead include directors under the broad category of "child care worker." Others may define a second level of teacher more highly qualified in child development than the rest of the teachers, but do not designate this person to necessarily fill the role of director. Those that

do designate separate requirements for directors, often use quite different terminology to define the director's role. Some states require that centers with forty or more children hire a nonteaching director.

In a 1984 position statement on nomenclature and the status of the early childhood profession, the National Association for the Education of Young Children recommended the title "early childhood specialist" to denote the individual who supervises, trains staff, designs curriculum and/or administers programs. However, this term has not been widely adopted by practitioners. Most center directors still refer to themselves as "director" or "administrator."

Almy (1982) refers to the director as an "early childhood educator," possessing the skills of the early childhood teacher plus, at a minimum, a thorough and current knowledge of child development and skills in working with adults, assessment and evaluation, administration and management, and research. "Such a person could bring to a large center, or several smaller centers, or a system of day care home, or some combination of homes and centers, the depth of knowledge that is needed if day care is to reflect the quality that early childhood teachers often talk about but less often realize" (p. 492).

Director Qualifications

Director qualifications can be divided into four categories: 1) age and other general background characteristics; 2) years of formal education (regardless of subject matter or specialization); 3) specialized preparation relevant to young children (e.g. training in developmental psychology, early childhood education, or program administration); and 4) experience working in a child care setting.

In most states the minimum age required for directors is 18 or 21. Some states also require directors to have demonstrated proficiency in basic literacy skills. In nine states, directors are not required to have any relevant qualifying education at all prior to employment (AK GA ID KY

LA MN MS NH TN). Minnesota, however, does require experience. Several other states require a high school diploma as formal education. In ten states, directors can lack a formal education, but only if they employ someone else who is qualified to be responsible for the programmatic aspects of the center (Morgan, 1987).

Twenty-six states require directors to be well qualified in child development and ten of these require substantial course work. Only six states, however, require that directors have coursework in administration as well as child development (CA, IA, TX, CO, PA, WI). North Dakota, requires "competence" in administration, but does not require formal training nor experience. One state, Texas, is in the process of establishing a credential for directors. Twelve states require ongoing training for directors (Morgan, 1987).

When compared to other human service professions, current regulations governing qualifications for center directors are at best at a paraprofessional level. Moreover, standards are often vague and unevenly enforced. References to supervised internship which is common in many teacher certification programs is entirely absent.

In a study of the expectations and requirements of state agencies overseeing early childhood programs, Slavenas and Sloan (1987) asked each state agency responsible for certifying staff to rate the importance of several administrative competencies. State agencies ranked competency in personnel management as the most critical for successful administration of early childhood programs, especially knowledge of appropriate hiring practices, licensing and certification regulations, and in-service training and supervision methods. Budget, curriculum (particularly the ability to meet developmental needs), and community coordination were also considered very important. Ironically, most of these same state agencies do not require formal training or the demonstration of competency in these areas prior to employment.

Profile of Early Childhood Center Directors

While very little systematic research has focused on early childhood center directors, it is possible to piece together a profile of directors' background characteristics from several studies that have looked into different aspects of the child care profession (Austin & Morrow, 1985-86; Coelen, Glantz, & Calore, 1978; Jorde-Bloom, 1988b, 1988c; Lindsay & Lindsay, 1987; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1984b; Norton and Abramowitz, 1981; Texas State Department of Human Resources, 1977; Washtenaw County Association for the Education of Young Children, 1985; Whitebook, Howes, Darrah, & Friedman, 1982).

The average early childhood center director is female (88% - 94%), between 36 and 42 years of age, and quite experienced. Directors have worked at their present position an average of five years and in the field of early childhood education for a little over nine years.

Salary data about directors tends to be unreliable because it is difficult to draw comparisons across program types. Directors of for-profit programs, for example, often draw a minimal salary, choosing instead to reinvest would-be compensation back into their center. This deferred compensation in the way of an increase capital investment is seldom reported on salary surveys. Other directors receive fringe benefits in lieu of salary (for example, free tuition for their child, use of the school care, tuition reimbursement for courses taken) which may be difficult to translate into actual dollar amounts. Directors also work varying schedules ranging from four hours per day for nine months to full-time for twelve months. Directors of campus child care centers often have dual assignments teaching undergraduate courses or supervising student teachers in addition to their administrative responsibilities. Directors of state- or federally-funded programs typically have not only higher salaries, but better job security.

Despite the complexity of gathering accurate salary data, what information has been collected does not provide a very glowing picture of the financial remuneration associated with the position. Over the past few

years, it also appears that director salaries have not kept up with inflation. A recent study conducted by the Child Care Employee Project in cooperation with BANANAS (1988) showed the average per hour starting salaries of directors in the San Francisco Bay Area actually decreased between 1986 ($11.85/per hour) and 1988 ($11.30 per hour). Similar findings are reported for other regions of the country.

Current Levels of Training

Approximately 78% of directors hold a baccalaureate degree and 38% of this group have gone on to earn a master's degree or doctorate. While there is little comparative empirical data published, it does appear that the level of formal training has increased in the last ten years. Still the level of education does not match that of elementary and secondary teachers where approximately 51% of the work force has an advanced degree.

There are also definite regional differences in the level of training of directors. A recent statewide survey in Georgia, for example, found a surprising lack of training; 30% all directors surveyed lacked any formal training. One surprising finding of this study, however, was that fully 88% of the directors surveyed felt there should be minimum training requirements for caregivers before beginning to work with children (Georgia Center for Continuing Education, 1987).

Typically, child care directors are promoted to their positions from the ranks of teachers. Norton and Abramowitz (1981) found that 78% of the directors they surveyed were head teachers or assistant directors before assuming full administrative responsibility for their center. Interest and experience appear to be the primary criteria for promotion, however, rather than formal training in program administration. Directors who have had concentrated course work in day care management are rare. Fifty-six percent of the child care administrators in the Norton and Abramowitz study indicated that they had had no courses or workshops in early childhood administration. And many of those that had taken course work in administration, indicated that the courses were taken after they became a director.

Most directors it appears, have put together a patchwork system of course work, in-service professional development, and on-the-job training. Those administrators who have received administrative training at the college level have usually taken a single course at a vocationally-oriented community college that covers everything from staff management to bookkeeping in one short semester. Only recently have a few intensive graduate programs in day care administration appeared (Jorde-Bloom, 1987b; Manburg, 1984).

Director's Professional Orientation and Commitment

Several recent studies confirm that directors as a group exhibit a strong commitment to the profession. Lindsay and Lindsay (1987) found that directors overwhelmingly perceive themselves as "professionals." In a recent study focusing on the professional orientation of early childhood workers (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b), fully 87% of directors surveyed perceived their work as a "career" as opposed to "a job." In another study (Jorde-Bloom, 1988c), well over 90% of the directors said they would chose a career in early childhood if they were to make a career choice again.

Still, it is disappointing to note that directors as a group do not engage in many activities associated with a professional orientation. Powell and Stremmel (1988) found that 41% of the directors in their study were not members of a professional organization. In the Jorde-Bloom study (1988b), a third of directors did not belong to one professional organization or subscribe to a single professional magazine or journal. Only slightly more than a third had attended two or more workshops or conferences during the previous year, and less than one-half of the directors had written a single advocacy letter during the previous year.

Perceived Problems of Directors

In a study of 141 child care program directors, Austin and Morrow (1985-86) found the concerns most frequently expressed as problem areas were: evaluating personal effectiveness, developing a center's philosophy,

evaluating the effectiveness of the center for the child; and establishing effective parent-center communication. Those administrators who had fewer years of education or did not possess a degree expressed greater concerns than those who did have a relevant degree and/or more years of education. The quantity and type of problems reported, however, were not necessarily linked to leadership quality. The greatest concern expressed was the need to keep abreast of philosophical and applied developments in the field. Program implementation and evaluation formed the next largest area of concern with over 86% citing need for better ways to evaluate themselves as administrators and their program.

Norton and Abramowitz (1981) found that the four areas most frequently expressed as troublesome areas for directors in which they needed additional support and help were: staff development and supervision; techniques for hiring and evaluating staff; ways to improve parent/teacher/administration relationships; and techniques for planning successful staff meetings and parent-teacher conferences.

Qualifications and Quality: Is there a Link?

Just how are director qualifications related to overall program quality? Ample evidence exists documenting a strong association between level of staff training and various indices of program quality, particularly child outcomes. Phillips (1987) summarizes research showing that both the total amount of formal education as well as the specialized nature of training are related to program quality. But most of this research has focused on caregivers (teachers) and the role they play in facilitating children's development.

Little systematic research, unfortunately, has been conducted investigating the role directors play (however indirect it may be) in influencing the contextual factors that support or inhibit quality experiences for children. Despite the lack of concrete empirical studies in this area, the prevailing wisdom in the literature supports the

proposition that the director is the "gatekeeper to quality," setting the standards and expectations of others to follow. It is the director who sets the tone and creates the climate of concern that is the hallmark of a quality program (Almy, 1982; Jorde-Bloom, 1987a, 1988a; Decker & Decker, 1984; Greenman & Fugua, 1984; Montgomery & Seefeldt, 1986).

The few studies that have been done in this area have looked at the director's level of experience in influencing program outcomes. In their Bermuda study, Phillips, Scarr, and McCartney (1987) found the overall quality of the center was highly associated with director's experience. In a Pennsylvania study, Kontos and Fiene (1984) found that children in programs with more experienced directors did better on measures of language and sociability.

Another recent study supports the proposition that the director in his/her leadership role sets the standards and expectations for staff to follow. Powell and Stremmel (1988) found that the program director has a strong impact on the variety and sources of information available to caregivers, particularly those with no or limited training in early childhood education or child development. The results of their study provide support for a "trickle down" conception of information flow from director to worker.

But this insight into information networks is disconcerting if one views it in light of the Jorde-Bloom (1988b) study cited earlier regarding director's level of professional orientation. Taken together, the Powell and Stremmel (1988) and Jorde-Bloom (1988b) studies suggest that the information that "trickles down" from director to untrained or minimally-trained worker may not represent a current technical base.

Making a Case for Increasing Requisite Qualifications

The central issue with respect to requisite qualifications focuses on the amount and content of formal training and experience that should be required before an individual assumes the role of center director and how much in-service training should be required each year once the director is on the job. In addition, considerations about program size as they relate to these qualifications must need to be factored in.

There is clearly a growing consensus that requisite qualifications for center directors should be strengthened. Such sentiments have come from professional associations promoting increased professionalism, experts in the field who see the programmatic effects of poor center leadership, and from practitioners themselves, those directors who day-to-day must cope with the demands of the job.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1984b, 1984c) recommends that center directors (early childhood specialists) should have a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education/child development and at least three years of full-time teaching experience with young children and/or a graduate degree in early childhood/child development. The competencies noted for the early childhood specialist highlight expertise in the supervision of adults and staff development. NAEYC recommends that this expertise be obtained through specific course work within a baccalaureate program or through additional training and experience beyond the baccalaureate degree. NAEYC's teacher education guidelines for colleges offering early childhood degrees (1982) also include standards addressing other administrative competencies such as program evaluation, community relations, and public policy.

In the criteria set forth for voluntary center accreditation (NAEYC, 1984c), the National Association for the Education of Young Children also recommends that the chief administrative officer of a center have training and/or experience in business administration. The chief administrative officer may or may not be the same person serving as early childhood specialist overseeing the educational program.

Leaders in the field, those individuals who have taken an active role in shaping social and public policy in early childhood education, are also becoming more vocal about the need to increase requisite qualifications for directors. In a recent study (Jorde-Bloom, in press), fully 90% of the national experts responding to a survey on the topic felt center directors should have specialized coursework in program administration along with a degree in early childhood/child development and related teaching experience before assuming the directorship role.

Many of these experts felt the skill and knowledge of the director was the most important ingredient in creating and maintaining a quality program for children. They also felt that child care administrators require a specialized curriculum which emphasizes management and leadership skills within the context of their professional interest. Thus, the importance of on-going in-service training was mentioned as an essential component of any standards promulgated to regulate director qualifications.

The rationale for increasing minimum standards is based in large part on what these experts perceive to be the increased complexity of the director's role and the potential risk to clients (children and parents) if responsibilities are not carried out in a highly professional manner. They cite, for example, the array of complex legal issues related to child abuse, infectious disease control, and insurance liability that did not confront directors just a decade ago. The knowledge and skills needed to tackle these potential problems does not always come from experience.

Two areas surfaced as being most critical for specialized training: financial management and staff management. Several experts noted that assuring the financial stability of a program in an era of dwindling governmental resources means that the director needs a unique set of fiscal management skills that cannot come from experience alone.

Most frequently mentioned, however, was the changing nature of the director's job in recruiting and training staff. With more opportunities for women in other fields, the pool of qualified personnel is becoming increasing competitive. This coupled with the low wages that most

caregiver/teacher positions command, almost guarantees both higher numbers of untrained staff applying for positions and a continued high turnover rate among staff. Thus the director's skill in staff development is paramount to maintaining program continuity and assuring that quality care is provided. These skills can only be crafted through formal training and on-the-job experience (Jorde-Bloom, in press).

Almy (1981) believes that training for the role of director (early childhood educator) calls for more than courses in education and psychology. She favors an interdisciplinary approach, stating that early childhood educators need to develop an ability to see the child and family from viewpoints of anthropologist, sociologist, social worker, pediatrician, nurse, nutritionist, economist, political scientist, and legislator, as well as educator and psychologist. This role, Almy argues, should be reserved for those individuals who combine advanced academic and practical preparation with the personal characteristics of interest in adults as well as children.

In a recent Illinois study (Jorde-Bloom, in press), most center directors agreed with experts that competence in many task performance areas should be required **before** an individual assumes the role of center director. Directors and experts differed, however, in the level of formal training that should be required as a prerequisite. Still, close to a third of the directors in this study felt the current state standards requiring two years of college with 18 semester hours of course work in child development/early childhood education provided insufficient preparation for the role. Many noted that their lack of training lessened their effectiveness in relating to the outside world. As a consequence, they felt ill equipped to perform many facets of their jobs.

The importance of experience cannot be minimized. In the Illinois study cited previously, experts and practitioners agreed that experience working with children is essential before one assumes the role of director. The only dissension came from a some directors (typically those without formal credentials) who felt strongly that experience should be an acceptable substitute for formal training.

There is some precedent for this position. In the past, states often equated a year of experience with a year of college. Research has shown, however, that education in early childhood or child development has a far stronger impact on teacher's behavior and on children's achievement than does years of experience (Roupp, et al., 1977). Moreover, as Berk (1985) points out, practical experiences may be effective only in the context of a broad-based formal educational program which serve as the necessary foundation for programmatic endeavors. Austin (1981) emphasizes that in-service training should never be viewed as the vehicle for achieving initial requisite competencies. He states, "Far from being helpful, it serves to maintain the child care worker in her lowly status by providing those in power with the useful argument than child care workers do not need to have degrees to be effective" (p. 251).

Powell and Stremmel (1988) also point out that child care experience is not a substitute for formal child-related training in developing a professional orientation to career development. They argue that training and experience are not interchangeable. In a study of 533 child care workers, they found that college-level training was associated with a professionally-oriented pattern of career development. Early childhood training but not work experiences was found to be a good predictor of professionally-oriented career development patterns. This is probably because formal training within an accredited college program ties workers into more traditional models of professional development. As Berk (1985) adds, this link in itself may help improve the stature and professional image of the worker.

Leaders in the field are evenly divided in their opinions about how program size should affect requisite qualifications for directors (Jorde-Bloom, in press). Many feel strongly that the principles of management are the same for different sized centers; it is only the scope of job that needs to be done that varies. Others, however, believe that the higher level of managerial skills required to effectively administrate a large center should necessitate more formal training as a prerequisite for the position. They state that organizing, planning, delegating, and

supervising others becomes more important in a large center. So, too, are the consequences of poor leadership. They also point out that this may be one additional way to differentiate career ladder steps within the category of center director. Experience administrating a small center (less than 25 children, for example) could serve as training ground for administrating a large center.

Obstacles to Change

If early childhood professional associations, leaders in the field, and a solid number of practitioners support increased qualifications for center directors, why hasn't there been more momentum in this direction? What are the obstacles to increasing present standards at the state level? And why hasn't the federal government taken a more aggressive role in establishing minimum and optimum criteria for staffing programs?

Certainly the push to strengthen requisite qualifications for child care personnel is not new. During the past decade, many leaders in the field have argued for more rigorous standards (Almy, 1975, 1981; Austin, 1981; Blase & Fixen, 1981; Colvin & Zaffiro, 1974; Norton & Abramowitz, 1981; Oyemade & Chargois, 1977; Peters & Kostelnik, 1981; VanderVen & Tittnich, 1986). Most experts in the field agree there is inertia in this area because of a number of economic and social considerations.

First, the link between salaries and educational qualifications is clear. The short-term impact of raising qualifications for directors (or for teaching staff) would be to exacerbate an already untenable labor pool situation. Finding and retaining well-qualified staff at all levels is a serious problem for many programs (Jorde-Bloom, in press; Smith, 1986). Simply put, highly trained individuals command higher salaries and have greater options both in the field and outside early childhood education.

The economic consequences of raising standards in most other industries results in a higher-priced product, the cost of which is either absorbed in company profits or passed on to the consumer. They same rules

do not apply to early childhood education. Parents (consumers) cannot shoulder increased program costs. In the for-profit sector, the profit margin is already a lean one (if one exists at all) and center operators claim they cannot absorb the added costs that would be associated with higher salaries without sacrificing quality in other areas. Nonprofit programs which rely on state and federal subsidies have had to cope with shrinking government revenues in recent years. Unless a major shift in priorities occurs, these programs would also not be able to absorb the costs associated with increased standards.

Indeed, because of difficulty finding qualified staff at current salaries, there has been a push from some in the field to lower or eliminate existing standards as they relate to personnel qualifications. Early childhood leaders counter by saying that reducing standards is a short term solution that would have unintended long-term consequences in deteriorated program quality.

But economic factors are not the only obstacles to attracting and maintaining competent staff. Certainly there are many individuals who accept lower pay as a trade off for a rewarding, high status positions. Most commentaries on the status of the early childhood profession (Benson, 1985; Jorde, 1982; Modigliani, 1986, 1988; Smith, 1986; Willer, 1987; Zinsser, 1986) agree that the devaluing by society of the work related to young children contributes to the low status of workers and consequently to their lower wages. These interlocking factors work against raising qualifications for any segment of the child care work force.

But as some early childhood advocates argue, improving qualifications may be the best way of improving salaries and increasing professionalism in the field. Differentiated staffing models with salary scales that reflect different levels of qualifications and work experience have helped improve the status of workers in other occupations. Creating a career ladder with differentiated qualifications and salaries could be an important first step to professionalizing early childhood education (Willer, 1987; Zinsser, 1986).

There is some support in the research that this may be an effective strategy. In their study assessing correlates of program quality, Howes, Pettygrove, and Whitebook (1987) found that programs committed to better funding for teaching and administrative staff did not report as many problems in recruitment and retention. A recent survey of programs which have implemented strategies to raise salaries also reveals that this may be an effective method of reducing turnover and ensuring program stability (Whitebook, Pemberton, Lombardi, Galinsky, Bellm, & Fillinger, 1988).

To minimize the economic disequilibrium and labor shortages that will result from increasing requisite qualifications for directors, it is important that changes in state standards be accompanied with sufficient funding for implementing a loan forgiveness program for students pursuing degrees, targeted scholarship money for low income students, and improved access to administrative training. These opportunities should be made available to current directors who wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills as well as to teachers who wish to pursue career advancement into the director's role.

While this modest proposal in itself will not assure higher salaries for early childhood workers, it will at least ease the financial burden associated with pursuing additional training and education. It would also begin to attract a wider pool of qualified candidates to the position instead of limiting participation in the field to those most able to afford the financial sacrifice. Most important, however, it would help change the image the the state licensing agency from being a punitive, regulatory agency to that of being a supportive, technical assistance agency.

In sum, increasing requisite director qualifications at the state level is a very cost effective way for state licensing agencies to impact the quality of program services. In the long run, it may even have the ancillary effect of decreasing the need for regulations governing other aspects of the program.

But what about the federal government? What are the roadblocks to ensuring greater uniformity in standards all around the country? The issue

of the federal government's role in advocating for clear minimum (and optimum) standards for child care programs has emerged as one of the most important and controversial social policy issues facing the country this decade (Kahn & Kamerman, 1987; Kendall & Walker, 1984; Morgan, 1984; Phillips & Zigler, 1987; Weintraub & Furman, 1987; Willer, 1987). Standards regarding minimum personnel requirements for staff working with young children are enmeshed in broader public policy questions of whether or not the federal government should be in the business of promulgating any standards for the center-based care of children.

Space does not permit tracing the historical antecedents that have contributed to the current impasse, but it is important to note that at the very time when day care needs escalated in this country, a policy trend toward decentralized and deregulated governmental involvement occurred. The results of lasts week's election do not give much hope that there will be a change in this trend.

That is not to say that child care advocates should stop speaking out about the need for the Federal government to take a proactive stance in ensuring that a floor of quality be guaranteed for every child attending an early childhood program in this country. To the contrary. Policy makers and the public at large need to be educated that federal standards will help improve the disparity that currently exists between states. But they also need to be educated that minimum standards only provide assurance that children are not exposed to detrimental care, they do not ensure that quality care is being provided.

If federal policy is to become the standard-bearer of quality, policy makers must make a conceptual leap from initiating policies that merely protect children from harm, to those that advance children's developmental needs. With this in mind, current strategies based on punitive, mandatory regulations may not be the most effective approach to achieving this goal. An incentive model, for example, may ultimately advance child welfare goals more than some current strategies based on punitive standards. Under such an approach some federal funds might be set aside for states whose

regulations meet a subset of optimum guidelines (Phillips & Zigler, 1987). Incentive models may also be more compatible with a philosophical orientation that supports states rights and deregulation.

Conclusion

In any public policy debate where the issues are complex, achieving consensus on possible directions for change is not easily accomplished. So it is with the issues surrounding the training and qualifications of early childhood center directors. This paper has provided a rationale for increasing the requisite skill and knowledge base of center directors. It has also detailed the economic and social ramifications of implementing such policies. Just how states respond will not only impact the quality of program services provided in the future, but the ability of the field to attract and retain competent and dedicated professionals.

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